

Psalm 61: Lead Me To The Rock

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[0 : 0 0] This evening with the Lord's help if we could turn back to that portion of scripture that we read in the book of Psalms and Psalm 61. The book of Psalms and Psalm 61.

We're going to read again from the beginning where David prays, Hear my cry, O God, listen to my prayer. From the end of the earth I call to you when my heart is faint.

Lead me to the rock that is higher than I, for you have been my refuge, a strong tower against the enemy. Let me dwell in your tent forever. Let me take refuge under the shelter of your wings.

Selah. But particularly the prayer where David says in verse 2, Lead me to the rock that is higher than I. Lead me to the rock that is higher than I.

Augustus top lady, he's well known to us as a hymn writer from the 18th century. But the life's work of Augustus top lady wasn't spent writing hymns, rather his life's work was spent writing as a Calvinist arguing with the Arminian John Wesley.

[1 : 1 7] Where Augustus top lady, he stressed the importance of God's sovereignty in our salvation. But you know, it was actually at the height of his controversy with John Wesley, that Augustus top lady, it was then that he wrote one of his most famous hymns.

And his inspiration had come when he was caught in a storm, and he had to take shelter in some of the Burrington cooms, or combs, in here, Somerset.

And while hiding in a cave sheltering under a rock, Augustus top lady, he was inspired to write the words, Rock of Ages, cleft for me, let me hide myself in thee, let the water and the blood from thy riven side which flow'd, be of sin the double cure, save me from its guilt and power.

He wrote those words when he was caught in a storm, he wrote those words confessing that Jesus was his Rock of Ages, and cleft for me.

And you know, when we come to the words of Psalm 61, we can see that David is also in the midst of a storm. And it's a storm which has left David feeling very distant, and very detached from the Lord, and also from the Lord's people.

[2 : 3 6] David feels very far away from the blessing which he once knew and loved. And you know, in Psalm 61, David is pleading with the Lord.

He's pleading that the Lord will allow him to have this sweet fellowship which he once had with him. And you know, this evening, although it's only a short Psalm, I'd like us to consider just the first half of Psalm 61.

Because as you'll see at the end of March 4, Psalm 61 is split in half using the word, Sela. Sela.

And the word Sela, it's a word that we often ignore when we're reading the Psalms, but it's actually an important word. It's a key word in the composition of the Psalms, because Sela literally means to praise.

And the purpose of Sela in the Psalms is for us to pause and to ponder what has just been said, so that it will lead us to praise.

- [3 : 39] And that's what I'd like us to do this evening. I'd like us to pause and to ponder on these opening four verses, so that these verses will lead us to praise.
- That they will lead us to give, as David does here, our Sela. And you know, we can look at these verses under three headings, three simple headings.
- Hear me, help me and hide me. Hear me, help me and hide me. So if we look first of all at hear me, hear me.
- David says in verse one, hear my cry, O God, listen to my prayer. From the end of the earth, I call to you when my heart is faint.
- David opens his prayer with the heartfelt cry, hear me, O God, hear me, O God. David, he comes before the Lord and he longs for the Lord to hear his voice and answer his prayer.
- [4 : 41] But you know what's distinct about David's prayer is that it's loud. It's not a silent prayer from his heart, although his prayer is from his heart. This prayer is a spoken prayer. It's an outspoken prayer. It's a loud prayer.
- Where David, he has raised his voice in prayer and he's crying to God for help. He says, hear my cry, O God, hear my cry, O God.
- And that word cry in its original sense, it expresses the idea of yelling or shouting or wailing. It's that heartfelt cry where there's pain and there's anguish and there's even tears.
- But you know, before we go any further in the Psalm and considering our own experience of prayer, don't you find it so humbling that we're able to bring out petitions and our prayers to the Lord?
- Don't you find it so humbling that we as sinners, sinners for nature and sinners by practice, sinners who have fallen short of the glory of God and yet we are able.
- [5 : 53] In fact, we have the privilege. We have the privilege of coming before the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. We have the opportunity to have an audience with the God of Heaven, the God of Heaven who is our creator.
- He's our sustainer and he's even our saviour. And yet we have the joy of knowing that we're invited. In fact, our Heavenly Father, he insists that we come to his throne of grace and no other so that when we come, we'll find mercy and we'll find grace to help in our time of need.
- And you know, my friend, whether our prayer at the throne of grace, whether our prayer is spoken in triumph or shouted in turmoil or even silent with tears, we can be assured that he hears all of them. He hears our prayers.
- Because is that not our Christian hope? That in Christ, in Christ we have received that spirit of adoption in which we're able to cry, Abba Father. And as a child of God coming before our Heavenly Father, the wonder is he understands even all our groanings which cannot be uttered.
- He understands the sighs. He understands the sorrows. He understands the silent prayers and even the shouts and the screams. He understands all of them. He understands all of them.
- [7 : 22] Is that not why you love the Lord, my friend? Is that not why you can confess with the Sammiston in Psalm 116, I love the Lord because my voice and prayers he did hear. I, while I live, will call on him who bowed to me his ear.
- My friend, is it not true that you love the Lord tonight because he knows and he understands all that you're going through? The world might not understand. Your family might not understand. But the Lord knows. The Lord knows all that you're going through.

And you know, for David, he loved the Lord because he was assured that the Lord would hear his cry. David was assured that the Lord would listen to his voice. He was assured that the Lord would bow down his ear to listen to him.

Is that not what David said back in Psalm 56? I draw your attention to Psalm 56 because our moderator of Presbytery, the Reverend James McKeever, he encouraged us all to read Psalm 56 as we came together in our homes to pray about this current crisis on Monday evening.

And we'll be doing the same again tomorrow evening if you're able to join together with us as we pray for our nation. But in Psalm 56, David makes this beautiful confession. He says, My wondering's all what they have been. Thou knowest their number took into thy bottle put my tears. Are they not in thy book?

[9 : 02] And you know, with that David, he was assured that the Lord would hear his cry and listen to his prayers. Because with every prayer, whether it was spoken with triumph or shouted with turmoil or silent with tears, the Lord was listening and the Lord was taking note. And I find the same is true for you and for me.

Whether our prayers are spoken with triumph or shouted with turmoil or silent with tears, we can be assured that the Lord is listening and the Lord is taking note.

And it's not the fact that our prayers are just hitting the ceiling and going no higher. No, every one of them were told rises before the throne of grace and they're heard in heaven.

They're heard in heaven. And you know, that's why David could come before the Lord. That's why David could raise his voice and prayer and say, as he says in verse one, hear my cry, oh God, hear my cry, oh God.

Now, as we said, David's prayer, it's a heartfelt cry where there's pain and there's anguish and there's tears. In fact, you could say that similar expressions are used in Psalm 130 where the Psalmist, you remember, he says, Lord from the depths to thee I cried, my voice, Lord, do thou hear unto my supplications voice give an attentive ear.

[10 : 35] You know, in Psalm 130, the Psalmist, he was in the depths because of his sin and he felt very far away from the Lord. And in many ways, that's how David felt. He felt far away from the Lord, not because of his sin, but because he was on the run.

David was on the run and David was on the run in Psalm 61. He was on the run from his son, Absalom, who had rebelled against his father and threatened to kill him.

And David had fled into the Judean wilderness and he had fled far away from Jerusalem. As far away as he could possibly go. And now with this storm in his life and on the run from Absalom, we find David, he's hiding in the wilderness, fading very far away from the Lord.

And David is crying for help. And you know, when you understand the context to the Psalm, we can see why David says in verse two that he was crying from the ends of the earth.

He says, hear my cry, oh God, listen to my prayer from the end of the earth. I call to you when my heart is faint. David was in the wilderness and he was far away from his home and his family.

[11 : 52] He was far away from his throne. He was far away from his palace. But more than that, David was far away from the temple. And that's what made David feel very distant and very detached from the Lord and the Lord's people.

And it's because of these feelings of distance and detachment that David's prayer, it progresses as we read through it. It progresses from hear me to help me.

And that's what we see secondly. Hear me and help me. Help me. David says, help me. We're reading in verse one.

He says, hear my cry, oh God, listen to my prayer from the end of the earth. I call to you when my heart is faint. Lead me to the rock that is higher than I for you have been my refuge, a strong tower against the enemy.

You know, as David cried these words to the Lord in the wilderness of Judea, he would have had the promise and the assurance that the Lord would hear him and the Lord would help him.

[13 : 05] But as we said, David felt, he felt very distant and very detached from the Lord and from the Lord's people. And this was not only because he was far away from his home and his family, but also because he was far away from the temple.

Because you know, for a Jew, the center of the earth and the center of their world was and still is Jerusalem. And as the king of Israel, Jerusalem was the capital city.

Jerusalem was where David's palace stood. Jerusalem was where his throne was situated. It was the throne of King David. David's, even David's home was in Jerusalem.

Jerusalem was where David's family lived. Jerusalem was where the Lord's people gathered year by year for all these feasts and festivals. But more than that, Jerusalem was where the temple was built.

Because it was Jerusalem, the city of Jerusalem, you'll remember it was built upon the holy mountain of Mount Zion. And it was in Jerusalem that the temple was built.

[14 : 13] And it was in Jerusalem, in the temple, in the holy of holies, that the Ark of the Covenant was situated. And of course, the Ark of the Covenant was the symbol of the Lord's presence amongst his people.

The Ark of the Covenant was that symbol of the Lord's confirmation towards his people of his unending covenant promise.

I will be your God and you will be my people. My friend, it's no wonder that David felt distant and detached from the Lord and the Lord's people.

Because for the Jews, the temple was the focal point of the nation. The temple was where the Lord's people gathered and where the Lord dwelt among his people.

And you know, the temple, it was precious to the Lord and it was precious to the Lord's people. Because it represented everything who the Lord is and everything about what the Lord is like.

[15 : 16] And we see that expressed in the Psalms. We see it expressed time and time again. We see it in Psalm 122. I joyed when to the house of God, go up they said to me, Jerusalem within thy gates, our feet shall standing be.

We see it in Psalm 48, where the Psalmist says that Mount Zion stands most beautiful, the joy of all the land, the city of the mighty king on her north side to stand.

We see it also in Psalm 102, where the Psalmist says about Jerusalem and about the temple. He says, thy saints take pleasure in her stones, her very dust to them is dear, all heathen lands and kingly thrones on earth, thy glorious name shall fear.

You know, we see it time and time again that the Psalms, they express what the temple meant to the Jews. There was the focal point of the nation, because it's where the Lord dwelt and it's where the Lord's people gathered together.

But for David, he felt like he was at the ends of the earth. He felt so distant and so detached from the Lord and his people. He feels so far away and he misses the blessing of gathering together in fellowship with the Lord and with the Lord's people.

[16 : 40] And you know, my friend, to some extent we can understand how David felt, can't we? Because although we're not on the run and miles away from God's house or God's people, but with the doors of God's house closed at the moment and God's people unable to gather together at present, you know, it's easy for us to feel detached and distant, it's easy for us to feel far away.

Because like David, we miss the blessing of gathering together in fellowship with the Lord and his people. But you know, you know, it ought to teach us and it ought to challenge us, because it challenges me.

It ought to teach us and challenge us not to take these things for granted. Because we're not to take the public worship of God for granted. We're not to take the people of God for granted.

And you know, my unconverted friend, I wonder that up until now, up until very recently, I wonder if you took these things for granted.

I wonder if you took the public worship of God for granted. I wonder if you took your weekly gospel opportunity for granted. I wonder if you thought that by just being in church on the Lord's Day that that would be enough to save you.

[18 : 13] But you know, now with the doors of our church closed and the public worship of God restricted, surely you can see that salvation by church attendance, it doesn't exist.

Because as the New Testament affirms and assures us, the Church of Jesus Christ, it's not a building. It's not a building. We may refer to the building we use to gather in worship together.

We might refer to it as a church and it may be the focal point of our community. It may be on a high hill somewhere. But you know, that's not the Church of Jesus Christ. Because my friend, the Bible tells us that the Christian, the Christian is the Church of Jesus Christ.

The person who confesses Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, they're the church. They're the Church of Jesus Christ. My Christian friend tonight, you are the Church of Jesus Christ. You are the temple of the living God.

That's what your Bible will tell you. And the wonder of the Church of Jesus Christ is that we may be scattered throughout our community. We may be confined to our homes. We may be unable to gather together for public worship.

[19 : 32] But the glory of the Gospel is that we're all united in Christ. We're all in union with Christ. We're all one in Christ. We're all under the King and head of our church.

The Lord Jesus Christ, who better to be with and united to my friend than him? Oh, who better to know than him?

But you know, for David, out in the wilderness, he felt distant and he felt detached from the Lord and the Lord's house and the Lord's people. And it left him crying. He was crying, hear me and help me.

But David knew that the only way the Lord could help him is if he was led to the rock, which is why David prays, lead me to the rock that is higher than I. You don't want a prayer for help.

Lead me to the rock that is higher than I. Of course, the theme of the temple, we know that the theme of the temple is mentioned in the Psalms quite a lot. But so is the theme of the Lord being the rock of his people. It's a theme that's found throughout the book of Psalms.

[20 : 49] And I know that I have bombarded you with many Psalms already this evening. But as John Calvin reminds us, he says the book of Psalms is an anatomy of all parts of the soul.

And the Psalms, well, they're good for the soul. And we see that when it comes to describing the Lord as the rock for his people. Psalm 95 urges us and says to us, oh, come, let us sing to the Lord. Come, let us everyone, a joyful noise make to the rock of our salvation.

Psalm 18, wonderful Psalm where David confesses throughout the Psalm, he says, the Lord is my rock. He says, my God is my rock. He says, who is a rock except God? He says, praise, be to a rock.

He says, the Lord lives and blessed be my rock and that the God of my salvation be exalted. Wonderful words. Even in Psalm 62, David testifies.

He says about the Lord, he only my salvation is and my strong rock is he. He only is my sure defense much moved. I shall not be.

[22 : 01] But of course, the most well known, Sam, which describes the Lord as a rock is that beautiful Sam of Sam 40, which is another Sam that was penned by the hand of David, where David says, and I'm sure you know it yourself.

He took me from a fearful pit and from the Mary clay and on a rock. He set my feet, establishing my way. He put a new song in my mouth, our God to magnify.

Many shall see it and shall fear and on the Lord rely. My friend, is that your testimony tonight? Is that your testimony tonight? Can you say with David, the Lord is the rock of my salvation. He is my strong rock.

He and blessed be my rock. Is that your testimony tonight, my friend? Because it's only when you know the Lord to be your rock. It's only when you confess the Lord is your rock.

It's only when you say my hope is built on nothing less than Jesus blood and righteousness. I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but Holy Lene on Jesus name, on Christ, the solid rock I stand, all of the ground is sinking sand. My friend, it's only when you know and confess the Lord to be your rock that you'll be praying with David, lead me to the rock that is higher than I.

[23 : 28] Lead me to the rock that is higher than I. Because it's when the Lord is your rock. It's when the Lord is your rock that you'll know that there's no one else in this world worth loving.

There's no one else worth leaning upon. There's no one else worth looking to, apart from this immovable and unchanging rock. Lead me to the rock, he says. Lead me to the rock that is higher than I.

But you know what we ought to notice from David's prayer is that he describes the Lord not only as a rock, but as an exalted rock.

Because that's what he means when he says, lead me to the rock that is higher than I. He's literally saying, lead me to the rock that has been highly exalted.

Lead me to the rock that has been highly exalted. I don't know if David fully knew what he was praying about, but you know as New Testament believers, with the full revelation of God's word, we know that there's only one rock who has been highly exalted.

[24 : 38] And that rock is Christ. In fact, Paul, he reminds us in Philippians chapter 2 that in order for our rock to be highly exalted, he had to be completely humiliated.

In order for him to be highly exalted, he had to be completely humiliated. And Paul says in Philippians chapter 2, he says, he says about the rock of our salvation that even though he was in the form of God, he thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation and took upon himself the form of a servant, was made in the likeness of men and been found in fashion as a man.

He humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. My friend, that's how low the rock of our salvation went for his people.

He humbled himself from the crown of glory to the cradle in Bethlehem to the cross of Calvary. He humbled himself down, down, down from the crown to the cradle to the cross, from glory to Golgotha, all the way to the grave.

That's how far our rock of salvation humbled himself. But Paul says, and this is what I love, he says God has also highly exalted him.

[26 : 03] He raised him from the dead. This is the New Testament hope. This is the hope we have on the Lord's day. He raised him from the dead. He gave to him a name which is above every name.

That at the name of Jesus, every knee will bow. And every knee will bow, he says, in heaven and on earth and even in hell. They will all bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

My friend, every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is the rock and we will confess his name to the glory of God the Father.

My friend, the rock of our salvation, he has been highly exalted. He has been raised from the dead. He has put all his enemies under his feet. He has been given a name that is above every name.

He has been crowned with a crown of purest gold. And he has sat down at the right hand of God the Father. And tonight, my friend, he ever lives.

[27 : 03] He ever lives to make intercession for us. And you know, when you think about it, or when you think about it, David's prayer is so beautiful.

Because in his feelings of being distant and detached from the Lord and the Lord's people, he says, lead me to the rock that is higher than I. Lead me to the rock that has been highly exalted.

Lead me to Jesus, he says. Lead me to Jesus. Is that not your prayer tonight, my friend? Lead me to Jesus.

Because to whom else can we go? He alone is the words of eternal life. He alone is able to help us and to hear us.

But you know, we have to ask, why is David praying this? Why is David praying, hear me and help me? It's because he wants the Lord to hide him.

[28 : 06] He wants the Lord to hide him. And that's what he goes on to pray. He says, hide me. Hide me. And I want us to consider this just, lastly and very briefly.

Hide me, hear me, help me, hide me. Hear me, help me, hide me. Hide me. We'll read again in verse one.

Hear my cry, oh God, listen to my prayer. From the end of the earth I call to you when my heart is faint. Lead me to the rock that is higher than I. For you have been my refuge, a strong tower against the enemy.

Let me dwell in your tent forever. Let me take refuge under the shelter of your wings. Sela. Sela. In these verses, David, he confesses that he wants to be led to the rock of his salvation.

Because that rock is his refuge. That rock is his refuge. And David says that that rock is the refuge in whom he finds safety, shelter and security.

[29 : 16] He is the refuge in whom he finds safety, shelter and security. My friend, the Lord is the rock and refuge of his people. And for David, who felt so distant and so detached in the wilderness, he's far away from the Lord and the Lord's people.

And he's longing for this closeness and fellowship and intimacy that he once had with the Lord's people and with the Lord. He longs to know more of that safety, shelter and security which the Lord as his rock and refuge could provide.

And that's why we find him praying here saying, hide me. Hide me. He says in verse four, let me dwell in your tent forever. Let me take refuge under the shelter of your wings, Sela.

Hide me. And you know, even reading that verse there, let me take refuge under the shelter of your wings. Again, we see that many of the Psalms, they're full of this imagery of sheltering under the wings of God.

This imagery of finding safety, shelter and security. We see that in Psalm 91. Psalm 91 assures us that the Lord will cover us with his feathers and we will find refuge under his wings.

[30 : 33] We see it in Psalm 63 where we're assured that joy is to be found under the shadow of his wings. And even David, he prays in Psalm 17, a wonderful, wonderful prayer in Psalm 17.

Keep me as the apple of your eye and hide me in the shadow of your wings. Keep me as the apple of your eye and hide me in the shadow of your wings.

And you know my friend, it's no wonder David prayed to the Lord, hide me. Because in the midst of the storm he was in, David knew, he knew that it was the Lord alone who was going to be his rock and his refuge.

It was the Lord alone. He was the one in whom David could find shelter and safety and security. It was the Lord alone that he could come to and say, hide me, hide me.

But you know what's remarkable is that it was in the midst of a storm. As we said earlier, it was in the midst of a storm that as Augustus top lady, as he sheltered under the rock in one of the Burrington combs, he echoed what David said here, he echoed David's confession.

[31 : 58] When he wrote those wonderful words, rock of ages, cleft for me, let me hide myself in thee. Let the water and the blood from thy river inside which flowed, be of sin the double cure, save me from its guilt and power.

Rock of ages, cleft for me, let me hide myself in thee. And you know my friend, that should be our prayer. Hear me, help me, hide me.

Hear me, help me, hide me. So may that be our prayer as we go into another week, a week of uncertainty, but a week in which the Lord knows the end from the beginning.

And maybe be assured that in the midst of all that may be before us, may we be assured that the Lord is our rock and our refuge. So let's pray these words, hear me, help me, hide me.

Well, may the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray. O Lord our gracious God, we give thanks to thee this evening that the order of rock, the order of refuge, the order of the one in whom we can trust, that there is no one else we can go to, there is no one else we can look to.

[33 : 23] For as thy word assures us that vain is the help of man, but better it is for us to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man. And Lord help us then we pray to be like David, to be praying, Lord hear me, help me and hide me.

That thou wouldst keep us as the apple of thine eye and hide us in the shadow of thy wings. That we would find protection, that we would find safety, shelter and security.

That we would find, Lord, the assurances of all thy great and precious promises. Promises, Lord, that remind us that the word one will never leave us and will never forsake us.

That the world may forsake us, but that this Jesus, as he is with us, for time and for eternity. Lord bless us then we pray, bless us in the week that lies ahead, a week that is unknown to any of us, but known to thee. Keep us then Lord we ask, by thy power and by thy grace, and go before us what we ask in Jesus name and for his sake. Amen.